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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 008527

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN
USAID/ANE/MEA
LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRANIAN PRESIDENT'S REMARKS
AND SYRIA

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, October 30, address a variety of regional developments, including the toll of the latest bombing near Ba'qouba in Iraq and the Syrian President's announcement of the formation of a Syrian investigative committee in the Hariri assassination, as well as Israeli attacks against the Palestinians.

Editorial Commentary on Iranian President's Remarks

-- "Wake Up Sleepy One!"

Former Minister of Information Saleh Qallab writes in the semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al Rai (10/30): "When the young bearded Mohammad Ahmadi Najad, who came to be the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the trenches of the revolutionary guard militias, launches the call for Israel's removal from existence, as Saddam Hussein had done before, it is in reality a call for all the wolves of this earth to come to eat at the banquet of this region at the expense of the poor people who are saturated with banquets of clumsy slogans and ideologies and sickening prospectus.... Whoever commits grave mistakes under egotistical pressures and pushes his country and people towards the abyss must bear the consequences. The Arab Nation has nothing to do with such flamboyant actions and stances nor with wrong decision committed by some in circumstances of over zealotness, blind estimation and over-confidence. The region is at the threshold of devastating quakes and what is going on today are mere indication of that".

-- "Yes to Ahmadi Najad"

Daily columnist Bassem Sakijha writes in the center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (10/30): "The world goes up in arms when Ahmadi Najad talks about wiping Israel off the map, but remains quiet when Israel removes Palestine not just from the map but from the conscience of the world.... The young Iranian President said what billions of people on this earth could not say: Israel is a fabricated entity and will continue to be so no matter how treaties countries sign with it. There is no place for Israel in a land that does not belong to it, and if and when it succeeds in imposing its opinion on the world today, it will not be able to do so forever. The destiny of this fabricated and imposed entity is doomed to disappear. Najad did not talk about the Jews and I don't think he meant them at all, because these are human beings who deserve to find their place on this earth, and maybe even in Palestine, but not in Israel ... which is a name that represents the arrogance of power and devilish frivolity. Is this hateful time going to allow us to declare our stand vis--vis what an elected Muslim head of state said so we can shout our yes."

-- "The Iranian attack in the region"

Columnist Khairallah Khairallah writes on the op-ed page of the independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad (10/30): "What makes Iran capable of adopting this attack policy, by which it wants all to understand that it is the first and foremost regional power in the Middle East and that it has extensive influence in the region, be that in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine or even the Gulf? The simple answer to this complicated question is that Iran is able to do that in view of the huge victory that the United States provided for it in Iraq. The volume of this victory is so huge that the Iranian regime is able to cast aside all European and American stances and to continue its nuclear program. This is all possible so long as the

thousands of American and British troops in Iraq remain hostages in Iran's grip. One cannot even talk Israel being really upset about the Iranian policy. The proof of that is that the Khudeira operation was as good as a gift for Ariel Sharon, who no longer feels the need to make any initiatives or take any steps towards meeting his serious and real opponent, the Palestinian National Authority, halfway.... It is Iran's right to choose the policy that best suits its purposes and to seek to have influence in all directions ... but for anyone to try and convince us that what Iran does is in opposition to Israeli interests is something to which the only response is this: any policy of a sectarian nature in the Middle East is always welcomed by Israel."

-- "Ahmadi Najad's gift to Bashar Assad"

Columnist Yasser Abu Hilaleh writes on the op-ed page of Al-Ghad (10/30): "It is difficult to view the remarks made by the Iranian President as being an unintentional mistake stemming from a sudden bout of enthusiasm. Most likely, the President's remarks calling for wiping Israel off the map are part of a strategy designed to confront the western pressures on Iran by escalating the situation. It is a strategy that is parallel to that adopted by the Syrian President (Iran's only ally in the region) ever since the arrival of the Americans in Iraq. The proponents of escalation in Iran and Syria believe that the concessions made during the Khatami era and the early days of Bashar Assad did not remove the two countries from the list of countries that support terrorism. The Iraqi lesson only confirmed that the Americans are serious about extracting what is left of the rogue regimes.... Ahmadi Najad and Bashar Assad may not fully realize the weaknesses of their own regimes, but it is easy for them to know the weaknesses of the United States in the region. The United States is involved in Iraq and is looking for a way out, and the Republicans are going through the worst time for domestic and foreign reasons. The United States might be able to bring down the two regimes in record time.... What is most serious about the Iran-Syria issue is that the Israelis are going to be a stone throw away from the Syrian artillery, and Hizbollah will not hesitate to execute higher orders, and, as for Iraq, Iran's allies will be right there. The United States knows the weaknesses of the two regimes, but it also knows that their collapse will not expand the influence of Al-Qa'eda."

Editorial Commentary on Syria

-- "The solution lies in the 'spring of Damascus'"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back page of Al-Ghad (10/30): "U.S. President George Bush is facing a severe political crisis that is eating away at the credibility of his administration, and this crisis is going to continue to push the level of the American people's satisfaction with Bush's performance down. Such internal pressures are going to force Bush to look for exits that are undoubtedly going to be external or foreign exits in light of the lacking domestic options. The U.S. administration is going to work on directing the American public opinion towards foreign issues in order to ease the focus on the President's domestic crisis and thus ease the pressure on Bush. All indications from Washington show that the Syrian file is a strong candidate for pre-occupying the American public opinion, since it is a file that all the necessary elements of intrigue and excitement favored by the American people.... Facts say that America will not minimize its campaign against Syria. This is a fact that Damascus must realize and deal with rationally and logically if it wants to protect itself from punitive measures that will be undertaken against it by Washington.... It is necessary for Syria to understand that the tools of the golden past - such as organizing 'spontaneous' demonstrations, releasing the arsenal of over-consumed slogans - are futile. Managing the current crisis requires convincing tools, first of which is reorganizing the internal situation. Meanwhile, the Arab world cannot stand with folded hands watching what goes in Syria and around it. The region is going to be inevitably affected by the repercussions of the current labor in Damascus.... The Arabs must push Syria towards making the investigation announced by Assad yesterday a serious and genuine one where it is possible to punish anyone who is convicted of the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister. More importantly, Syria must understand the importance of initiating a genuine democratization process.... The Syrian people represent the first line of defense

for Syria. There is a need for the Syrian people to pull in ranks around their homeland, and the way to do that is clear and the key to that lies with the Syrian regime, which wither must open up to its people and punish those who deserve to be punished or face a future whose outcomes will be destructive to the regime, to Syria and to the entire region."

HALE